

INFORM

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SITUATION REPORT
NOVEMBER 1996



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NEWS HEADLINES

Based on information collated from the Island (I), Daily News (DN), The Observer (O), Sunday Observer (SO), Sunday Times (ST), Sunday Leader (SL), Weekend Express (WE), Mid Week Mirror (MM), Divaina (D), Lankadeepa (LK), Veerakesari (VK), Thinakaran (TK), Lakbima (LB), Ravaya (R).

- 01: 15 hardcore Tiger suspects held in Vavuniya; (I.p.1)
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- 02: JR is dead; (Is. p.1)
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- 03: No UN troops for North-East: President assures Indian High Commissioner; (WE.p.1)
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- 04: CBK vs Sunday Times trial: Defence moves to summon Chandrika; (ST.p.1)
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Arrangements are being made to put up a big camp to accommodate 10,000 people in Vavuniya; (TK)
Interpol alerted on mysterious arrival of Tamil woman; (I.p.1)
- 05: 13 LTTErs die in STF ambush at Kankachchivatta in Wellawaya in Moneragala district; (I.p.1)
Chitra Rajendran, 18, deportee from Denmark arrested by Dehiwala Police on 3rd; (TK)
Demonstration at Vavuniya to call for re-opening of schools where displaced people from North are accommodated, a memorandum handed over to Additional G.A; (VK)
- 06: Five Tigers killed in Valikamam West, Jaffna; (I.p.1)
Government lifts ban on medical supplies to Madhu refugees; (I.p.3)
Rape and murder of Krishanthi Kumarasamy and family: eleven soldiers held; (I.p.1)
Defamation case against Sunday Leader: publisher and editor plead not guilty; (DN.p.1)
- 07: Tiger killed in army ambush at Thadduvenkody in Kilinochchi district; (I.p.1)
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Amnesty for army deserters till Nov. 15; (DN.p.1)
- 08: Over 10,000 flee to Vavuniya from LTTE controlled areas; (I.p.1)
ICRC visits captives; (I.p.1)
- 09: CID questions Ranil on Batalanda; (I.p.1)
LTTE announce destruction of 31 sentry points at Ganeshapuram in Vavuniya, 7 LTTErs and 5 soldiers killed; (VK)
- 10: 2000 lorry loads of essential items needed monthly in Vanni; (SI.p.1)
Bus from Vavuniya to Batticaloa fired at, at Kaluvankerny, 14 civilians and 03 soldiers injured; (VK)
Bomb blast at Salu Sala in Jaffna, 2 civilians killed, and 4 injured;(VK)
Ready for talks with LTTE, says the President; (SO.p.1)
TULF, National Peace Council protest: hundreds of disappearances in North; (SO.p.1)
Denmark lawyer visits Tamil deportee in Dehiwala police cell; (WE.p.1)
Stringent action called for in Krishanthi killing; (I.p.1)
- 11: 4 Denmark journalists detained at Mt. Lavinia Hotel; (VK)
LTTE attack Army patrol at Nidanwela in Pollonnaruwa, 6 Policemen and 4 Home Guards killed; (TK)
Over 6,000 Tamils return to Jaffna; (I.p.1)
In a move to prevent Tiger infiltration, Army to have 2 camps in Yala; (I.p.1)
Sea Tiger boats destroyed off Madagal, LTTE loses 20 cadres; (I.p.1)
- 12: 1 soldier killed and 2 injured in a landmine blast at Thondamanaru in Jaffna; (VK)
Clash at Nochchimodai in Vavuniya, 1 soldier killed and 2 are missing; (VK)
Clash in Madagal sea in Jaffna: 2 Navy boats damaged and 3 LTTE boats destroyed by the Navy; (VK)
- 13: LTTE rejects President's call for peace talks; (MM.p.1)

Bonafides of Danish journalists in question; (DN.p.1)
 New search and destroy operation launched in East; (I.p.1)
 14: Clash at Mylankarachchi in Batticaloa, 15 LTTEs killed; (TK)
 Government deports four Danish journalists; (I.p.1)
 Forces inflict heavy casualties on Tigers; (DN. p.1)
 Cecil Waidyaratna refused bail; (DN. p.1)

15: Clash at Meeyankulam in Batticaloa, 20 LTTEs killed and 2 soldiers injured; (VK)
 Government lifts ban on transport of medicine to Mallavi; (I.p.1)
 Pradesheeya Sabha chairman arrested; (DN. p.1)

16: Shell Gas strike halts gas production, distribution; (I.p.1)
 Nurses issue ultimatum over salary anomalies; (I.p.1)
 G.L. heads delegation to Paris Aid Group meeting; (I.p.1)

17: LTTE grenade attack at Tirunelveli in Jaffna, 5 civilians injured; (VK)

18: LTTE attack on sentry point at Poovarasankulam in Vavuniya, 4 soldiers and 4 LTTEs killed; (VK)
 Shell attack at Iluppadichenai in Batticaloa, 3 civilians including a baby injured; (TK)
 T.Vimalanathan, 26 year-old father of 3, killed in crossfire between the Army and the LTTE at Murakkoddanchenai in Eravur; (TK)

Shell-Union dispute: Labour Commissioner meets parties today; (DN.p.1)
 19: Forces recover 144 Grenades at Kokkuvil in Jaffna; (VK)
 Shell Gas strike talks at stalemate; (I.p.1)

Krishanthi killing: suspects to appear in Jaffna courts on December 12; (DN.p.1)
 20: Forces attack LTTE at Gajabapura in Welioya, 3 LTTEs killed; (VK)
 LTTE communication headquarters in Kilinochchi destroyed; (I.p.1)
 Donors pledge US \$ 860mln; (I.p.1)
 Gas strike ends; (I.p.1)

21: LTTE destroys armored car at Kodikamam in Jaffna; forces attack on LTTE bases at Kokkavil and Pooneryn by air; (VK)
 6 dead bodies found at Eluthumadduval in Thenmaradchi, 4 of them identified; (TK)
 Govt. warns employers who harbour army deserters; (I.p.1)

22: Troops recover high explosives in Jaffna: VIPs told not to attend functions in the North; (I.p.1)
 23: Air attack at Vavunatheevu, Kokkaddicholai, Iluppadichenai, several houses damaged and 12 civilians injured; (VK)
 LTTE attack Army vehicle at Kovilady in Trincomalee, 1 Lieutenant killed, 2 soldiers injured; (TK)
 Women police platoons to fight in operational zones; (I.p.1)
 60% of 28,000 army deserters return; (I.p.1)
 President off to France on official visit; (DN.p.1)

24: TULF calls for Commission of Inquiry: youth disappear in the north; (SL.p.1)
 Batticaloa under aerial bombardment; (WE.p.1)
 Red alert in Colombo city; (ST.p.1)

25: Hand grenade attack at Trinco: 6 civilians injured; (TK)
 2 dead bodies found at Vavuniya, handed over to Vavuniya Hospital for identification; (VK)
 Anurudhdha calls on army deserters to return and save the nation from terrorists; (DN.p.1)

26: LTTE suicide bomber jumps on army vehicle, driver injured; (VK)
 LTTE attack at Kiran, 1 soldier killed and 4 civilians and 2 soldiers injured; (VK)
 Krishanthi killing: suspects further remanded; (DN.p.1)

27: Limited Army operation at Poovarasankulam in Vavuniya on Monday; (VK)
 12 dead bodies washed ashore in the Mullaitivu sea, bodies not identified; (VK)
 France understands Sri Lanka's position - President; (DN. p.1)
 French support to fight separatists; (DN. p.1)
 Over 10,000 army deserters return; (DN. p.1)

Newspapers don't deliberately distort facts - Edmund Ranasinghe; (DN. p.19)
 28: Shell attack at Kiran in Valaichenai kills S. Mylvaganam, 60; people flee from Kiran; (VK)
 Fewer manufacturing sector strikes in '95 - CB Survey; (DN. p.1)
 Local polls in the North; (DN. p.1)

Political asylum refused for SSP Douglas Peiris; (I. p.1)
 29: 16 persons, including a Muslim student, arrested in Puttalam after a search operation; (TK)
 Ponnampalam Nanthinathan, 31, arrested on suspicion at Hiniduma; (TK)

2 LTTErs shot dead by the Forces at Point Pedro in Jaffna; (TK)
4 more dead bodies washed ashore at Pulmoddai; (TK)

30: Tamil parties oppose local elections; (I.p.1)
Govt. stops alienation of land around Digavapi; (I.p.1)
Britain repeats its offer to be mediatory; (I. p.1)
Buffer stocks of essentials for Jaffna; (DN. p.1)
Greater emphasis on private sector, says President; (DN. p.1)
Dharmasiri opens country's first media training institute; (DN. p.2)

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As always in November, the focus of the media and of the government was on the meeting of the Sri Lanka Aid Consortium in Paris. This year, the Sri Lankan government received a grant of US \$ 860 million, registering an increase of US \$ 17 million over last year's allocation. In a press statement issued jointly by the World Bank and the Presidential Secretariat of Sri Lanka after the meeting, it was stated that the 12 donor countries and 7 multilateral agencies pledged their continuing support to the Sri Lankan government, along with reassurances of special support for rehabilitation and reconstruction in the north. The statement stressed that 'reconstruction and lasting peace would only be possible under conditions of macro-economic stability and economic growth' and emphasized the need for accelerated structural reforms and a reduction of the fiscal deficit if the objectives set out by the Sri Lankan government for itself were to be achieved. In a special note, the Norwegian delegation made a request to the parties involved in the conflict in Sri Lanka to resume peace negotiations.

The peace process, however, continued to stall with both President Kumaratunga and LTTE leader Prabhakaran making contradictory statements about their willingness to re-enter a process of negotiations. Progress at the Select Committee also continues to be slow, despite Minister Peiris' assurances that the draft of the new Constitution would be ready for debate by Parliament in the first half of 1997. In this context, the general level of frustration and disillusionment with regard to the peace process continues to grow within all communities on the island.

On the ground, the cost of the war both in terms of the financial expenditure as well as in terms of the human lives lost in the processes of the war continues to cause grave concern. In the north and east, including in areas formally under military control, regular skirmishes between the LTTE and the security forces have taken a steady toll of lives; being small in scale, these confrontations rarely hit the news headlines, and yet the total of those killed runs to at least 100 persons each month. In addition, there have been a number of LTTE attacks within the Vavuniya District, including some dangerously close to Vavuniya town, which is by now the northernmost civilian outpost on the route to the north. In Vavuniya town itself, the large numbers of persons coming in, seeking admission to the south, is causing many problems. Obtaining clearance from the security forces to travel to the south continues to be a difficult

task and the conditions under which people are detained in the existing camps leave much to be desired. The situation of persons residing in areas north of Vavuniya continues to be hazardous, with supplies of essential items of food and drugs being sporadic and insufficient.

The military recruitment drive of the past months did not succeed in drawing in as large a number as had been anticipated. Thus, the need to strengthen recruitment remains a main imperative of the defence authorities. The campaign to offer amnesty to deserters and those members of the security forces who had absented themselves without leave also reached its peak in November. December 1 was set as the expiry date of the amnesty offer, and regular announcements were made over radio, television and newspapers networks outlining the penalties for employing deserters and giving shelter to them. It still remains to be seen how successful this amnesty campaign has been. Although it was announced several months ago, the response so far (as at the last week of November) had been poor. Seeking to bolster the combat units deployed against the LTTE, in November the Defence Ministry launched a project to set up women police fighting platoons. Approximately 475 Reserve Women Police Constables have begun their training at Mahiyanganaya and the Air Force base at Katunayake.

Two cases of rape and murder in the Jaffna peninsula by members of the armed forces came before the courts in Colombo in November. In both cases, the military authorities have produced persons suspected of involvement in the crimes before the judiciary. However, how the cases will proceed is still to be seen. The issue of disappearances in the north in the past few months has been taken up by the defence authorities and an inquiry into the whereabouts of these persons is under way.

In the meantime, following agitation by several groups in the south over the deteriorating human rights situation in areas under military control in the northern peninsula, the government agreed to permit the Human Rights Task Force to set up an office in Jaffna. By the end of November, the HRTF began making preliminary arrangements to establish themselves in the peninsula. However access to the north is still denied to journalists and human rights workers, and this continues to hamper the free flow of information on the actual situation in the north as well.

as possibilities for interventions on on-going human rights abuses in the area.

Intelligence reports that the LTTE was planning a big attack somewhere in the south to mark LTTE leader Prabhakaran's birthday and the LTTE Heroes Day on November 26 led to increased surveillance in Colombo and other parts of the south. Although no big attack had taken place upto the first day of December, there were several arrests made of LTTE operatives who, it was claimed, were to have launched suicide attacks in the city. The intensification of security measures invariably led to many complaints of undue harassment and detention of Tamil civilians.

Several strikes and work-to-rule campaigns affected public life considerably throughout November. The strike at the Shell-owned Gas Company led to shortages of gas countrywide, and disrupted several industries to the point that entrepreneurs too made their own appeals to the government to resolve this dispute; this strike also raised serious issues about the government's privatisation programme. Members of the para-medical staff in government hospitals launched a work-to-rule campaign and effectively created enough disruptions in the health services to lead the Ministry of Health to initiate discussions aimed at negotiations over their demands, which include a wage increase and recognition for para-medical services by the medical sector.

The sale of the Ceylon Steel Corporation to a Korean company, Hanjung Ltd. was announced by PERC in early November. This generated a great deal of protest and opposition both from the workers as well as from some trade unions and political groupings, on the basis that the Corporation was being sold for much less than its true worth. 26 Opposition MPs have demanded a debate in Parliament on this issue.

The Ruhuna University in the south of the island remained closed despite assurances from the higher education authorities that it would be re-opened in November. Investigations into the clashes on the campus between groups of students and between students and the Police which took place in August and which led to the closure of the University have not been concluded to the satisfaction of some sections of the student body, and the JVP-dominated Inter-University Student Federation has organised a series of demonstrations to draw attention to this situation. The newly opened South-Eastern University was also closed after some inter-student disputes.

In the south,a grouping of progressive individuals and organisations calling itself the Coalition against

Political Violence has launched a campaign urging all political parties to denounce the use of violence in their propaganda and campaign activities. Representatives of the group have met with high-level representatives of many major political parties and will continue to do so throughout the coming month as well. Political violence continued to simmer, especially between the UNP and the SLFP; some clashes between UNP and SLFP supporters took place in Kantalai in mid-November and 6 persons including the Chairman of a UNP-controlled Pradesheeya Sabha were taken into custody in this connection. On November 22, the 5 persons remanded in connection with the killing of the brother of a candidate for Cooperative Society elections in Piliyandala, including a member of the Western Provincial Council, were further remanded until December 5.

Disputes within the People's Alliance continued to fester, with Minister Ashraff coming in for attack because of two projects he had undertaken as Minister of Ports and Shipping - the Colombo Port rehabilitation and the construction of a harbour at Oluvil in the Eastern Province. There was also a great deal of controversy around the issuing of 150 acres of land belonging to the Digavapi Buddhist temple, which is a historic Buddhist site in the Amparai District, to Muslims re-settled in the area. This had apparently been approved by the Addalachenai Divisional Secretariat. Following protests from a number of Sinhala and Buddhist organisations as well as after interventions by political figures, the move was temporarily halted.

There were several interesting developments within the JVP, with a new faction surfacing in London under the leadership of Mrs. Upatissa Gamanayake, one of the leaders killed in November 1989 and with the expulsion of MP Nihal Galappaty from the Sri Lanka Progressive Front which has announced its stakes as the official representative of the JVP and challenged the leadership of Somawansa Amerasinghe, who seems to head a third faction. With the expulsion of Mr. Galappatty the JVP lost its representation in Parliament.

In November, at the fall session of the UN General Assembly, Sri Lanka became one of the 18 new members to be elected for a 3 year term to the Economic and Social Council which is one the highest bodies within the UN system.

WAR IN THE NORTH AND EAST

In the North :

In the Jaffna peninsula, the security forces continued to face attacks from the LTTE even in the so-called 'cleared' areas. Among the clashes reported between members of the LTTE and of the security forces were those that took place in Thondamanaru, Tirunelveli and Kodikamam. In addition, an attack on the Salu Sala outlet in Jaffna town on November 9, which killed 2 civilians and injured several others, generated tension in the area. The discovery of a large stock of explosives in the peninsula towards the end of November led to an order being issued prohibiting any high government officials or VIPs from visiting the north for a few days at least.

The high rate of infiltration of the peninsula by the LTTE continues to be a cause of grave concern to military authorities. For example, in the past few months, over 12 lamp-post killings had been reported from the Valikamam West area. Those executed in this fashion by the LTTE were accused of collaboration with the Sri Lankan army. Army sources said they estimated that at least 200 LTTE infiltrators were hiding in the Valikamam West area where the army has no permanent presence; on November 4, a major operation was mounted to track these infiltrators down.

On November 3, troops confronted a group of Tigers at Karanavai; 2 LTTEs were reported killed in this clash. On November 9, an officer of the Engineers Regiment was killed at Manipai in the course of a search operation conducted by the armed forces. On November 10, the Navy attacked and destroyed four Tiger boats off the coast of Madagal; it was said that the boats were on their way to launch an attack on the harbour at Kankesanthurai. About 30 LTTE cadres were reportedly killed in this operation.

The security forces also continued to attack suspected LTTE bases both within and outside of the peninsula in the Northern Province. There were several air attacks, including in the Pooneryn area. On November 19, the Air Force announced that it had destroyed four LTTE strongholds in the past days, including the LTTE's communication headquarters in Kokavil, in the Kilinochchi area. Towards the end of November, reports came in that several bodies had been washed ashore at Pulmoddai, near Mullaitivu. It was not clear where they came from, and they were unidentified.

In and around Vavuniya too there were several incidents in which the LTTE and members of the security forces clashed. On November 7, the LTTE attacked several sentry points in and around Ganeshapuram, about 4 kilometers north of Vavuniya; it was feared that several members of the LTTE could have infiltrated Vavuniya town during the attack, which lasted four hours. On the 9th, there was another attack at Nachchimodai, again very close to Vavuniya town. On the 10th, a bus from Vavuniya to Batticaloa was attacked at Kaluvankerny and on November 18, an attack at Poovarasankulam. It was later revealed that the army had fired on the bus at Kaluvankerny by 'mistake'; 13 persons were injured in this shooting, 10 civilians and 3 army personnel.

In the East :

The LTTE and the security forces continued to battle for control of the Batticaloa District, with newspapers reporting that on November 26, LTTE Heroes Day, the LTTE declared open several Police Stations and other offices in the areas of the District under their control. The LTTE also attacked several electricity transformers in the District, plunging parts of it into darkness for days at a time. The restoration of power could only be arranged by supplying power also to those areas under LTTE control.

In mid-November, Prof. Ramakrishnan, a philosophy lecturer at both the Eastern University and at Peradeniya University in Kandy and a member of the Board of the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation was abducted by the LTTE while in the hostel of the Eastern University campus. He was still hostage by the end of the month, with a ransom of 1 million rupees being reportedly demanded for his release. This incident contributed to heighten the tension in the area.

The air force launched several attacks on areas across the lagoon in Batticaloa where the LTTE reportedly has its bases. Several civilians were injured and one death was reported as a result of the shelling in the Kokkadicholai and Elupaddichchenai areas in the last week of November. There were also attacks and counter-attacks in Kiran and Eravur areas; 1 civilian was killed in crossfire in Kiran on November 28, when the military launched an operation in reprisal for an LTTE attack on the 26th.

In Trincomalee too, there were several clashes and confrontations between the army and the LTTE. On October 20, 5 LTTE suspects and an army corporal were killed and three soldiers injured when some LTTE prisoners staged a dramatic jail break at the

Trincomalee Military-Police Detention Centre at Customs Road in Trincomalee town. The escapees had grabbed the gun of an unsuspecting soldier, Corporal Bandara, and shot him dead before making their escape. 4 of those who escaped were recaptured, and 4 remain at large. A similar jailbreak took place in Trincomalee in March this year.

In the last week of November, there were several incidents in Trincomalee that created uncertainty regarding the security situation in the area. On November 24, there was an attack on an army patrol in Kovilady; on the 25, in Trincomalee town, a hand grenade attack injured 6 civilians. On November 28, a suspected LTTE suicide bomber attacked the jeep in which the senior Police officer for Trincomalee normally travelled; on that day, however, he was not in the vehicle. The driver of the vehicle was seriously injured and died later in hospital.

There were also clashes in the border areas of Polonnaruwa and Amparai. 10 security personnel were killed in an attack on a patrol in Nidanwela in Polonnaruwa on November 10, and another attack took place on Gajabapura in Welioya on the 20th. On November 3, 13 Tigers were killed by STF commandos in the Amparai district.

Civilian life in the North and East

On November 5, the government lifted the ban on the transportation of medical supplies to Madhu in Mannar district. The medical relief agency MSF (France) was informed of the government decision. At the same time, the government also lifted a four month long ban on the transportation of medicines to Mallavi by MSF (Holland). Mallavi is where the Base Hospital previously in Kilinochchi has now been relocated. MSF (France) also said they had received information that the government would permit 3 members of their team to be located in the Jaffna Hospital. The details were still being worked out.

Civilian life in the Vanni District continued to be hampered by the on-going war. People from the peninsula and from Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu continued to pour into Vavuniya and the 'transit' camps overflowed with northerners seeking to enter the south, to travel to Colombo or to Trincomalee, where many of them wanted to take the ship to Jaffna. According to reports, about 15,760 persons had come in to Vavuniya from the north in the weeks following October 22, when restrictions on travel to the south were lifted. They are housed in 11 Welfare Centres. The 3 original camps in Vavuniya, Punthoddam, Veppankulam and Nelumkulam, can house only about 4000 persons; thus, 7 schools have been closed

down and handed over for use by displaced persons. About 8500 school children have been deprived of their education as a result, including almost 2500 who were scheduled to sit public examinations at the end of the year. The worst situation is reported from the Railway Goods Shed in the Vavuniya Railway Station which is a temporary holding Centre for youth under investigation.

Records show that 48,831 persons are drawing dry rations from Rehabilitation Ministry sources in Vavuniya; the figure for the Vanni District is 200,548. In a statement prepared by the Vavuniya government Agent K. Ganesh, it was recorded that over 6000 Tamils including public servants and university students had returned to their homes in Jaffna from refugee camps in the Vanni within the first two weeks of the month. However, given the deterioration of the situation in the northern peninsula, the numbers wishing to return to Jaffna were fast dwindling.

The categorization of displaced persons coming in to Vavuniya at the Thandikulam sentry point is in itself creating some problems. There are five categories, according to the Coordinating Officer of the region :

1. Persons who are seeking to travel to Jaffna;
2. Permanent residents of Batticalao, Trincomalee and Puttalam who want to return to their homes;
3. Persons who require medical treatment, persons with confirmed air tickets for travel outside the country and public servants who need to travel south of Vavuniya for work-related purposes;
4. Traders who come in to Vavuniya town for trading purposes and return within the day;
5. Persons between the ages of 14 and 35.

Traders complain that although they travel regularly to the town for commercial purposes, they are still required to obtain passes each time. Any visitor to Vavuniya also requires a pass; this is issued for 1 day, and can be extended up to 3 days and later extended for a week or longer, depending on the purposes of the visit; however, sometimes, it takes one day to obtain the pass for one day ! The youth are separated from their families and kept in a separate camp and taken out for extensive interrogation in small groups at a time. Persons within the transit camps cannot leave the camps for any reason and are also denied contact with outside persons. One of the most distressing sights reported to us by persons who have travelled to Vavuniya in the past weeks is that of

anxious families separated by the walls and barbed wire of these camps.

In a statement made to Parliament on November 14 regarding the situation in Vavuniya, TULF MP Neelan Tiruchelvam also highlighted the problems of sanitation and health services within the camps, as well as the inadequacy of food and drugs. In addition, he emphasized that many problems are compounded by the lack of Tamil-speaking security personnel to man the check-points and conduct investigations.

Meanwhile, conditions in Vavuniya town itself were difficult. The facilities of the town are ill-equipped to deal with the influx of thousands of persons; the transit camps in and around the camp are overcrowded and feelings run high against this enforced and unofficial incarceration of citizens in their own country. There are frequent clashes between the LTTE and the security forces and it is clear that the LTTE is able to infiltrate the town fairly easily. The presence of armed PLOTE cadres in the town further complicates the situation. Among the major problems faced by the residents of Vavuniya town in the face of the continuing displacement of persons in the Vanni are the rising cost of living and accommodation in the town, and the high level of insecurity. On November 20, PLOTE organised a token fast in the town to focus attention on the various problems being faced by the people of the area.

In November, the government announced that it was spending Rs. 16.8 million on supplying food to displaced persons. However, there still continue to be complaints that sufficient stocks of food and other essential items are not being sent to the north. For example, even though estimates that about 1700 lorry loads of essential items are needed for Mullaitivu, only 50 lorries were being cross-loaded per day from the Vavuniya checkpoint.

Disappearances

Human rights groups and activists from the south have joined Tamil political parties in voicing serious concern over the disappearances of youth from areas 'liberated' by the army in the northern peninsula. The situation became the focus of attention in the national press after two young women - Rajani Velayuthapillai and Krishanthi Kumarasamy - were reported missing in two separate incidents in September. Both bodies were later found; Krishanthi's was in a grave along with the bodies of her mother, her brother and a neighbour who had gone to search for her. Rajani's body was in a toilet pit. It is alleged that both women had been raped before being murdered. A coalition of Colombo-based human rights groups and women's

groups formed a Committee to continue agitation on these cases and to draw public attention to human rights abuses in the north.

Following agitation regarding disappearances in the north, the government and the military were compelled to take some action in the matter. 11 members of the armed forces were remanded on November 4 in connection with the Kumarasamy case; they were to be formally indicted for rape and murder by State Counsel Prashanthi Mahendaratna in the Colombo Magistrate's Court on December 2. 6 have been remanded in connection with the Velayuthapillai case, which is scheduled for further hearings on December 9. At first the Kumarasamy case was due to be heard in the Magistrate's Court Jaffna, but was later shifted to Colombo for security reasons on both sides.

The HRTF was formally granted permission to begin operations in the north. The Government Agent Jaffna handed over a list of 543 names of youth who were reported missing by their relatives, to the Chairman of HRTF C.T. Jansz. The TULF also expressed concern following the discovery of the decomposed bodies of six civilians in a shallow grave in Thenmarachchi, Jaffna on November 18. 4 of the 6 were identified as Ponnu Alagaratnam, Kandiah Thiagarajah, Kandiah Kulendraraja, Thammu Manikkam. The TULF has called for the appointment of a Commission of Inquiry into these disappearances. TULF MP Joseph Pararajasingham, in a letter to the President, has given a list of 24 names of persons who were reported missing after been taken into custody by the security forces.

Prisoners of War

During the month of November, representatives of the ICRC were allowed to visit 16 security forces personnel and six civilians held by the LTTE somewhere in the Vanni region. The sixteen comprised two navy men and 14 soldiers. in addition, 16 fishermen and the 8 member crew of the passenger vessel 'Irish Moana' were also visited by ICRC representatives during this period.

The tragedy of the diaspora

The tragedy of the Sri Lankan situation was borne out in two incidents which took place in November. One was the deportation of a young Tamil girl, Chitra Rajendra, from Denmark. The other was the death of nine Tamils in the Ethiopian Airlines crash in late November.

In the first week of November, newspapers reported the arrival of a 'mysterious' Sri Lankan woman from Denmark under Danish police custody. On November 2, the CID reportedly cabled Interpol in Denmark for further details regarding this case. The 18 year old woman had disembarked and left the airport for an unknown destination after being processed by the immigration authorities. Her passport carried the name Chitra Rajendra and gave her place of birth as Kopai in Jaffna. According to reports, there had been many protests in Denmark over this deportation. It was reported that she had arrived in Denmark three years ago after her mother was allegedly killed in a LTTE bomb explosion. There was also some speculation as to her brothers, who were said to have been members of the LTTE; one report said the woman herself had been a nurse with the LTTE.

On November 3, Ms. Rajendra was arrested at a hotel in Mt. Lavinia along with a television journalist from Denmark, named Jens Moller. She was produced before the Mt. Lavinia Magistrate Sarath de Abrew and was ordered to be detained at the Salvation Army Home till November 21 under Emergency Regulations. Two of her family members too were taken into custody and detained under Emergency Regulations.

Four Danish journalists who came to Colombo to cover Ms. Rajendra's deportation - Jenson Jens Mollar of TV 11 Television, Nils Olsen Egon of Politiken, Ole Hofflund of Berlingske and Morten Jastrup of Information - were also questioned by the CID in this connection. Their hotel rooms were searched extensively, and they were deported from the country on the orders of the Secretary to the Ministry of Defence on November 13.

The Defence Ministry, explaining why it had been necessary to serve deportation orders on journalists, said that none of them had sought press accreditation from the Department of Information, which is the procedure to be followed by journalists on assignment in Sri Lanka. In the circumstances, 'given their close association with Ms. Rajendran, who is suspected of LTTE connections', Defence Ministry sources said that it was thought necessary to detain the four persons for questioning, in order to ascertain their Bonafides. In the above circumstances, as 'their continued stay in Sri Lanka could be of detriment to the country, it was decided to serve deportation orders on the four persons'.

When Ms. Rajendran's case was called before the Magistrate on November 21, following submissions

by the acting Director of the Crimes Detection Bureau in which it was admitted that there was no evidence to prove that any one of the three persons in custody had any connections with the LTTE, all three of them were discharged and released.

Police and Ministry of Defence actions in this matter and the deportation of journalists have only reinforced the feeling that deported Tamils are liable to harassment on their return.

It was a few days after the first reports of the crash of an Ethiopian airliner in the Comoros islands in late November that the news came through that there had been 9 Sri Lankans on that flight. It later transpired that all 9 had been Tamils who had flown from Singapore via Bombay to Lagos, Nigeria, had been refused permission to land there and had been returned to Bombay only to be rejected by the Indian authorities as well and put back on the flight to Lagos. This nightmare experience of convoluted travel routes and deportation is common to many Tamils - and some Sinhalese - who try to leave Sri Lanka without proper visas; these persons are usually also the victims of extremely sophisticated trafficking gangs who specialise in smuggling people to Europe and North America for very exorbitant prices.

From the point of view of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, both the ever more frequent deportations of Tamils from the northern countries with scant regard for their fate once they reach Sri Lanka and the increasing number of tragic stories about persons who fall prey to trafficking gangs indicate the extent and seriousness of the problems within the country which make people want to flee the island at no matter what cost and also point to the stake northern countries may have in supporting a negotiated resolution to the conflict at least as a mode of preventing the outflow of refugees and asylum-seekers from Sri Lanka to their part of the world.

Prospects for Peace

On November 5, in an interview on November 5 marking the completion of two years of the Kumaratunge presidency, President Kumaratunga said that the government was ready to use a third party to facilitate a dialogue if that would help bring the LTTE to the negotiation table. The President said that the talks could take place at any time once the LTTE had indicated its willingness to lay down arms and to agree to a fixed and limited time frame for peace negotiations. This echoed her expression of

interest in third-party mediation as reported in the Frontline of the earlier month. However, in response to an anxious inquiry from the Indian government, the President herself reassured officials at the Indian High Commission in Colombo that she had no intention of permitting foreign troops on Sri Lankan soil.

In turn, in a broadcast on Heroes Day on November 26, LTTE leader Prabhakaran went on record as saying that 'no liberation movement with self-respect could accept such humiliating conditions'. The LTTE leader went on to say that 'political negotiations should be preceded by creating conditions for de-escalation, withdrawal of troops and normalcy'. In addition, in his speech, Mr. Prabhakaran attacks the government of President Kumaratunga as giving institutional form to Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism. His speech received wide publicity in the press in the south.

Observers have commented that the indictments served on Mr. Prabhakaran in the Courts in Colombo and the international campaign mounted by the Sri Lankan government against the LTTE send signals that are counter to the official calls for peace and negotiations. At the same time, accounts of the desecration of LTTE graveyards in the north by the security forces and other similar actions cannot be seen as in any way conducive to building confidence in the hearts and minds of the ordinary Tamil civilian that the Sri Lankan government is committed to opening up a democratic space for the Tamil population of the island.

On November 27, the Commissioner General of Elections announced that elections would be held for all local government authorities in the north excluding Mullaitivu and Vavuniya Urban Council. These include the Jaffna Municipal Council, the Urban Councils of Velvetithurai, Point Pedro and Chavakachcheri as well as 23 Pradesheeya Sabhas - 12 in Jaffna District, 3 in Kilinochchi, 4 in Mannar and 4 in Vavuniya. Nominations were to be received between December 11 and December 18 in Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Vavuniya and Mannar.

The Tamil political groups that had earlier requested the government to set up an Interim Council in the north and east and permit them to begin political activities in these areas feel that this is a proposal that undermines their capacities to engage in any kind of political activity in their areas. At a joint meeting held on the 29th, TELO, EPRLF, PLOTE, EROS and EPDP decided to oppose this move by the government. The TULF also expressed its strong opposition to the proposed elections. Among the

reasons cited by the Tamil politicians have been the difficulties of conducting a free and fair election in a context which is complicated by the on-going war and in particular by the displacement of most of the voters of the Northern Province.

Discussions have continued at the level of the Parliamentary Select Committee regarding the shape of the future Constitution. Among the areas taken up for discussion - albeit inconclusively - have been the devolution of powers to the regions with regard to land, finance and law and order. Among the agreements was an amendment to the original draft, to the effect that no Regional Council could enact legislation that would be inconsistent with or in contradiction to the Constitution.

Budget

The third budget of the PA government was presented in Parliament on November 6 by Deputy Finance Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris. It extended the National Security Levy and the Save the nation Contribution by one more year. Revenue measures included

- a 10% excise duty on hard liquor
- a 5% excise duty on selected passenger vehicles
- increase in passport fees except for Middle East Countries
- turn over tax increased 6 and 10 % to 7 and 11 %
- 10 to 15 % increase in administrative fees and charges
- 50 cents increase in ordinary postal rate.

The budget also provided for an increase in salaries to public servants according to the recommendations of the B.C.Perera Commission on Salary Anomalies to be implemented in two stages. Public servants will receive 40% of the increase recommended by the Commission from 1.1.1997 and the balance 60% from 1.1.1998. The budget also contained tax relief and tax exemption structures for exporters.

Aid Group Meeting

At the Paris Aid Group Meeting, donors pledged US \$ 860 million to Sri Lanka, concurring with the government of Sri Lanka that peace is the highest priority and that economic reform must go hand in hand with peace efforts. The Sri Lanka delegation was led by Justice and Constitutional Affairs and Deputy Finance Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris.

The World Bank document circulated at the meeting commented on the deterioration of Sri Lanka's economic performance in 1996 as a consequence of

the 'government's preoccupation with war and devolution, the severe drought of 1995 and reduced investor confidence'. According to the report, 'growth and investment have slowed, the fiscal deficit remains very high, inflation has increased substantially and the balance of payments has weakened'. The report also states that 'almost one-fourth of the population lives below the poverty line according to the one dollar a day per person benchmark'.

As far as steps to prevent the downward spiral of the economy are concerned, the document proposes 'restoring macro-economic stability through strong fiscal adjustment and reviving the growth process by resuming structural reforms'. Exports and private investment are viewed as the main engines of growth and the report comments 'escalation of the war and insufficient support for reforms are the biggest risks'.

According to the figures set out in the document, 'current expenditures exceeded 23% of the GDP, reflecting escalating military spending, a growing interest burden on mounting debt levels and an expanding social welfare programme'. Among the measures taken by the government which came in for criticism were the granting of tax holidays for BOI enterprises and the restoration of the wheat subsidy which were cited as 'evidence of a lack of commitment to financial discipline'. The high cost of the Samurdhi programme is especially mentioned as is the need to improve incentives in agriculture. Among the proposals made by the Bank for the agricultural sector are phasing out the CWE and the Paddy Marketing Board, liberalization of wheat imports and bringing tariffs in line with WTO agreements.

Batalanda Commission

Leader of the Opposition and the UNP Ranil Wickramasinghe was interrogated at his office by the CID on November 7 for nearly five hours on matters known to him pertaining to the investigations now being conducted by the Batalanda Commission.

The Commission has continued its sittings throughout November, and has heard the evidence of several persons, including Heiyantuduwa Simon Silva, Meryl Francis Perera, K. Don Nimal Chandraratna all of whom had first-hand experiences of the Batalanda 'detention Centre' as well as a parent, Liyanage Sumanadasa, who had two sons taken into custody.

SSP Douglas Peiris, who is one of the principals

against whom evidence is mounting in the course of the hearings of the Batalanda Commission had left the country and sought asylum in Switzerland. Newspapers of November 27 reported that his asylum application had been rejected by the Swiss authorities. In the meantime, the authorities in Sri Lanka are trying to obtain his return to Sri Lanka in order to face the charges against him.

Trade Union Actions

On November 2, the Attorney General's Department recommended to the Public Enterprises Reform Commission (PERC) that the terms of the acquisition of the Gas Company by Shell Company Ltd. needed to be re-negotiated. The arbitrary decision taken by the Company to increase gas prices in October had sparked off controversy regarding the deal.

On November 15, around 350 employees at the Mabima and Orugodawatta installations of Shell Lanka Ltd staged a protest campaign against the company's decision to dismiss nine employees following a senior Shell manager's complaint that there was a breach of safety when a consignment of cargo was being cleared at the Colombo Port. The All Ceylon Commercial and Industrial Workers Union (ACCIWU), which called the strike, protested against what they termed the high-handed action of some persons in the company resorting to a kind of disciplinary action which they said had never been enforced under state management. The management, however, insisted that the offence committed by the nine employees is of such a serious nature that they can not be reinstated without compromising on discipline in the organisation. After 5 days, the strikers decided to call a halt to the strike after prolonged talks between the ACCIWU and the Employers' Federation under the mediation of Labour and Vocational Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa. According to the terms of the agreement the ACCIWU will present a written apology to the management of Shell Gas Company on behalf of its membership expressing regret for the events of the past five days, and the Company will withdraw the suspension orders on the nine employees. The employees were to return to work shortly after the meeting. The Company assured the workers that they would get salaries for the period when they were suspended and, in the event of strikes in future, it was agreed that the Shell employees will give sufficient notice to the management.

The work-to-rule campaign conducted by the Joint Council of Professionals Supplementary to Medicine,

which is a federation of professionals working as physiotherapists, radiographers, occupational therapists, laboratory technicians and pharmacists, came to a temporary halt after the intervention of the Ministry of Health.

Media and Press Freedom

The expulsion of four Danish journalists from the island led to many protests being filed with the Sri Lankan government from media freedom groups within Sri Lanka and abroad.

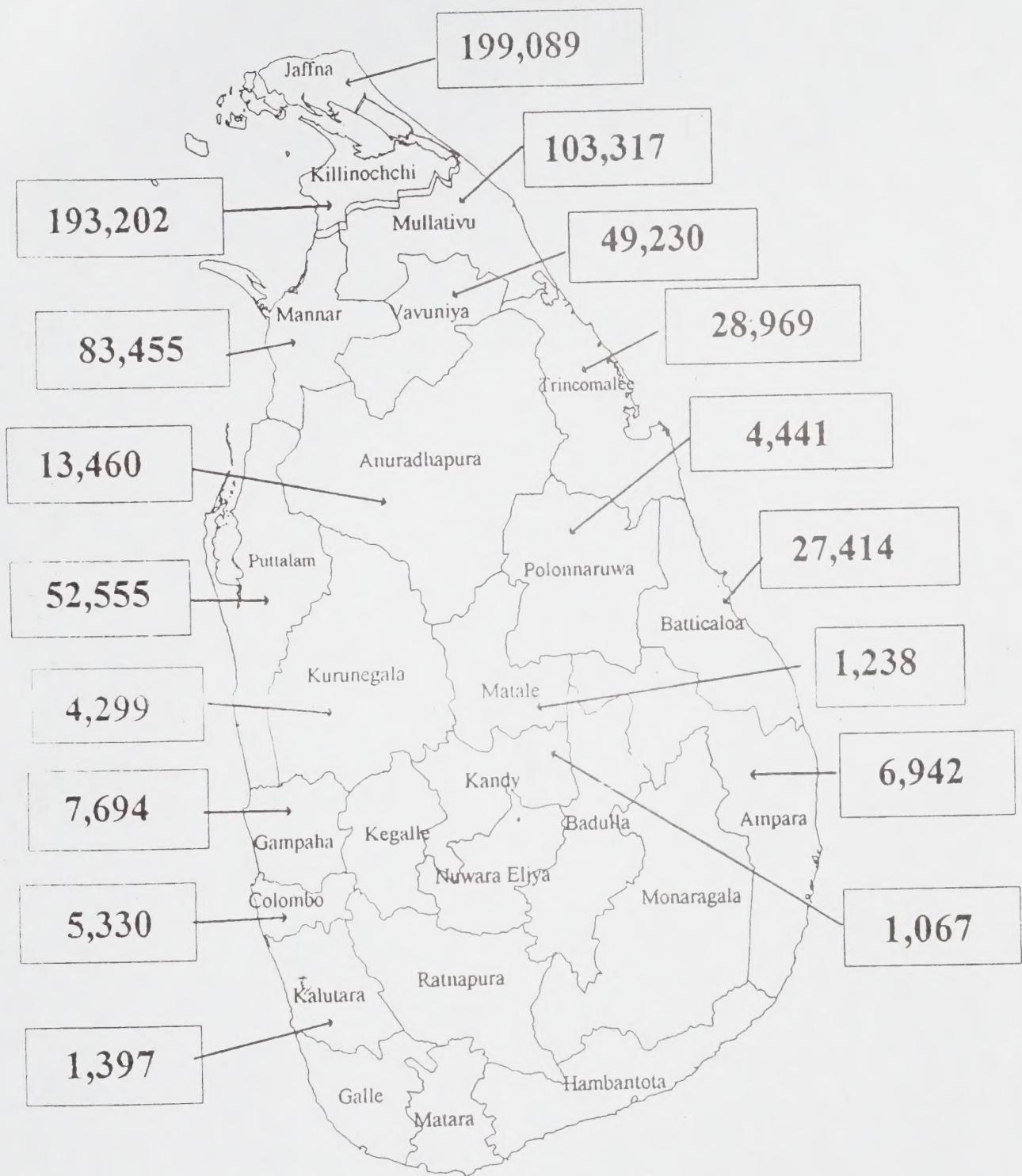
The case in which the editor of the Sunday Times is charged with defamation of the President continued to be heard, with several leading journalists, including Edmund Ranasinghe of the Island group, Mr. Desmond Fernando, eminent lawyer and presently Secretary General of the International Bar Association and Mr. Rohan Edirisinghe, lecturer in law at the University of Colombo, being called to give evidence in support of the accused.

In the case in which the editor and publisher of the Sunday Leader were accused of defamation, both pleaded not guilty to the charges and the case was put off for January 22nd 1997.

Supreme Court appointment

The appointment of Ms. Shiranee Bandaranayake as a member of the bench of the Supreme Court has generated a great deal of controversy within legal and political circles. There have been reports of farcical meetings of the Bar Association and Bar Council where there have been deep divisions on this issue. The arguments focus on Ms. Bandaranayake's lack of experience and the inadequacies of the process of making judicial appointments. On the first day that Ms. Bandaranayake was due to sit on the Bench, one senior member of the Bench refused to sit with her, on the grounds that she was a respondent in a fundamental rights application that would come before the Court shortly. Three separate cases alleging violation of fundamental rights were lodged by lawyers in this regard, and a special 7 member bench of the Supreme Court was due to hear the cases on December 5.

Displaced Population as at 30.10.1996



Total displaced population : 785,187
Children under 5 yrs. : 75,377

